

May 29, 1973

To the Editor
The New York Times
229 West 43rd Street
New York, New York 10036

Dear Sir:

I was a teenager in Italy when Mussolini clamped his dictatorship on the Italian people. My eyewitness observations, plus later study, make me find some frightening similarities between the events of 1926, when the Italian democracy was formally destroyed, and the current American scene.

There as now here, scandals were rocking a conservative Government. Mussolini's close personal associates were involved in the murder of opposition politicians and in all sort of illegal acts. There as now here, the ruler was appealing to the overriding interest of national security against subversion.

Discontented veterans were being exploited, as our prisoners of war now are, to raise the flag of patriotism. They were used to threaten "spontaneous" physical violence against democrats and anti-fascists -- a role for which the President appears to be coaching our returned prisoners of war.

A Parliament of "castrati" made feeble noises of protest but could muster no leadership for resistance. The Italian Parliament, like our Congress now, was ready to collapse before any show of force.

The revelations of Watergate are less ominous than the recent speeches by President Nixon and his brutal uncovering of the network of secrecy and espionage he has been fashioning for the American people. It is only because he failed in his attempt to muzzle the press and the media that his attack on our democracy has been at least temporarily frustrated. But the dangers still exist.

After half a century, Mussolini may now be seen by historians as a comic-opera tyrant; but forty million people suffered and millions of Italians, Greeks, Ethiopians, and Americans died because of him. Richard Nixon may also, in reality, be less dangerous than he now appears, provided we do not lean back passively, in fright or indifference, and let him destroy our democracy in the name of "national security."

S. E. Luria